

Organization will require it to reform a very large portion of its economy, and not only to comply with WTO rules, but to be able to compete internationally.

With a "yes" vote on the motion to proceed and a "yes" vote on approving permanent normal trading status for China, we can help change the world. China constitutes one-fifth of the world's population. We can be on the right side of history. We ought to be on the right side of history. I urge a vote for this motion to proceed and a vote of yes on final passage.

I yield the floor.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BROWNBACK). Without objection, it is so ordered.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader.

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, I would like to use an amount of my leader time prior to the time we go to the energy and water bill to speak on an unrelated matter.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

FIREFIGHTING HELP IN SOUTH DAKOTA

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, I haven't had the opportunity yet today to welcome all of our colleagues back and to express my hope that we use this next period as productively and as successfully as we can.

As have most of my colleagues, I had the opportunity to spend a good deal of time at home in South Dakota for the last 3 weeks.

I especially want to commend the Forest Service for the extraordinary job they have done in fighting historically the most consequential fire we have had in the State now, with 85,000 acres of timberland burned. I am grateful for the response we have had from people all over the country. I especially thank the Forest Service, the Governor of the State of South Dakota, William Janklow, for the remarkable job he has done, the National Guard for their response, and the volunteer fire departments from all over the State of South Dakota and surrounding region.

We are grateful for their extraordinary response, and we are grateful as well for the effort that has been made to contain the fire which is now 85-percent contained.

I thank the volunteer ambulance personnel whom I met from all over the State. We are experiencing what many of our colleagues are experiencing with

volunteer ambulance service. Many of them are on the verge of going out of business because of reimbursement schedules for Medicare and Medicaid. Without those, especially in rural areas, we are in a very serious set of circumstances involving the health and in many cases the lives of people who live in rural areas today.

I thank those in schools all over South Dakota who opened their doors and their offices to me in Kadoka, White River, Lemmon, and most of our Indian reservations in Belle Fourche. I thank them.

I thank those who especially were willing to meet with me on hospital reimbursement and appreciate very much their willingness to talk about how serious the circumstances were with regard to Medicare reimbursement for hospitals and clinics throughout our State.

I must say, at virtually every one of our stops we had occasion to talk about the unfinished agenda here in the Senate. I want to talk just briefly about that prior to the time we turn to another important piece of legislation, the energy and water bill.

UNATTENDED LEGISLATION

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, there is great concern about unattended legislation, legislation having to do with health care, education, meaningful gun safety, and minimum wage. There is no legitimate reason we could not have accomplished something on each of the issues I have mentioned and many more.

There is no legitimate reason this Congress couldn't have passed a real Patients' Bill of Rights long before this.

There is no good reason we couldn't have added a voluntary Medicare prescription drug benefit.

There is no reason we couldn't have agreed by now to strengthen our children's schools. We have had many opportunities. There are those who say that passing bills is hard work.

If you want to see real hard work, go to Murdo, South Dakota some day. Talk to Cathy Cheney and the five other members of her volunteer ambulance squad.

They are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. When a call comes in—even if it's in the middle of the night—they drop whatever they're doing, leave their jobs and families, and go. Most times, they are not back for at least 3 hours.

When they're not answering calls, they're studying for certification tests. And they don't get paid a dime for any of it. That is hard work, Mr. President. And it is not just South Dakotans who face challenges like this.

Go to any community in any state in America, and you'll find people who are working hard—some of them are work-

ing two and three jobs—to make a decent life for themselves and their families, and to give something back to their communities.

You will find older people who worked hard for 40 and 50 years, who are retired now. They are not asking us to do the impossible.

They are not asking us to make unreasonable concessions. All they are asking is that we make a good-faith effort to solve the problems these families are dealing with today and who face the challenging months and years when they must examine, address, and answer problems in their own lives.

When the 106th Congress began, many of us had great hopes about what we could accomplish.

We had had budget surpluses 2 years in a row and were on our way to a third year—something that hadn't happened in 50 years. The economy was setting record after record.

After years of having to downsize our dreams because of the deficit, Americans were finally in a position to start hoping again, and tackling some of the big challenges facing working families.

Nearly 2 years later, almost none of those hopes has been met.

As we near the end of this Congress, it appears increasingly likely that they will not be met. One reason for that is, frankly, our less than ambitious legislative schedule. If we adjourn, as planned, on October 6, the Senate will have been in session for a total of just 115 days this year. That is 115 out of 365.

By any objective measure, that is not exactly breaking a sweat. In fact, it is the lightest Senate schedule since 1956. It is only 2 days more than the infamous do-nothing Congress of 1948. But the calendar is not the only reason we have achieved so little.

A more significant, and troubling, reason for this Congress' inaction has been the absolute refusal by Republican leaders in both houses to pass the people's agenda.

For 2 years, majority leaders in both houses have used their numerical advantage, and every parliamentary trick they could find, to prevent us from passing a real Patients' Bill of Rights.

Despite the fact that there is an overwhelming majority in the Congress and an overwhelming majority of the American people who want campaign finance reform, Republican leaders in both Houses have prevented us from passing the McCain-Feingold bill.

Despite pleas from the victims of the Columbine tragedy and more than a million moms who came to Washington to petition Congress, Republican leaders have repeatedly refused to pass reasonable gun safety measures.

They oppose our plan for affordable prescription drug coverage. They oppose our plan to strengthen our children's schools by making classes smaller and schools safer and setting higher standards.